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THE ETHICS OF PASSION.

A leading characteristic of the present time appears in the increasing diffusion of independent thought. In past times an Englishman could be relied on to accept from tradition certain broad principles of conduct in public and in private life. He did not examine these principles: he breathed them with the air. But it is becoming more and more his tendency to take nothing on trust, to refuse submission to the claims of any so-called principles, until he has seen them in relation to the needs of the individual, that is of himself. It will not be necessary, under existing circumstances, to relate this observation to the conduct of public affairs.¹ It is the object of the present essay to consider certain effects of the tendency which already manifest themselves unmistakably in our domestic life.

The spirit of independence has its drawbacks, varying in proportion to the value of the principles it calls in question, and the difficulty of apprehending them; but it has counterbalancing advantages. Principles which rest on no reality crumble at its touch. Yet inasmuch as few principles have been accepted by society and passed into its "conventions" without in some measure representing truth, it can never be fair to assume that a convention is wholly devoid of basis; and to criticise it profitably is to separate in it what is reasonable from what is not. Such a task requires a degree of patience and discrimination hardly attainable except by those who make of such attainment their conscious aim. And thus it comes about that certain laws of life are hastily disposed of as unreal, because society, in giving them its sanction, has not accurately defined their scope.

It is a characteristic of this new spirit of criticism to set reason above reverence. Whereas there were at one time topics which by common consent were regarded as intimate,

¹ Written in the last days of the late Conservative administration.

if not sacred, and it was the habit of the younger generation to believe that life involved difficulties of which experience alone held the key, it is now the custom for the most delicate of problems to be handled in ordinary conversation, for questions which require the subtlest understanding of the most intricate social relations to be discussed with reckless assurance. There is, in fact, no subject exempt from the methods of free speech now current, and only one subject for which exemption is pretended. But as this pretence is as harmful as everything else fictitious, and serves to give a negative emphasis to the hidden subject, as, moreover, the number of publications which deal with it directly or indirectly is continuously increasing, there seems no choice left but to draw the veil aside, and admitting fully the delicacy and difficulty of the task, attempt to treat the subject in the light of day, criticising the critics of society, and showing how far her tradition or instinct in the matter can be justified. The subject in question is the mutual love of man and woman, the true relations in that love of mind and body, the meaning of marriage. The ruling of society in these matters has been administered with the utmost sternness and its extreme penalty invoked upon the least appearance of neglect—but without avail. The present generation decides that severity was assumed to cover an insecure position and supports the decision by an argument of overwhelming force. It points to the admitted fact that marriage, as society has understood it, represents no single principle; that it stands for a concession to the baser elements of human nature; that the act which renders possible the continuance of the race is declared indistinguishable from the satisfaction of impure desire. To these ideas, and whatever apparatus society may summon to enforce them, the present generation rightly refuses its submission. It will not lightly receive its condemnation, and revolts against a verdict which, claiming the authority of experience, reveals a spirit of cynicism and distrust. The value of the revolt remains to be decided and will depend on the sincerity and moral fibre of those who have undertaken it. Its main line of attack seems, however, to have defined itself already, and calls for the consideration due to a

subject in which the nation's welfare is involved. It begins by insisting that the intercourse of the sexes and the desire which seeks expression in it belong to the equipment of true manhood and true womanhood, their pride and not their shame. It holds that marriage, as at present understood, imposes false restrictions upon this intercourse; that its true warrant lies not in a covenant, indiscreetly made in youth and found in later life to be arbitrary, but in that sense of spiritual unity which belongs to periods of passionate feeling, and naturally claims for itself a physical expression. Serious difficulties attach to the conception, but a relentless logic is applied to them. The state of emotional exaltation which is held to justify this completeness of union cannot be commanded by the will, perhaps cannot always be controlled by it. It is not regarded as on that account less worthy of a place in human life. Rather is it held to belong with those higher instincts which, like the inspiration of the poet, are chiefly valued for the power of their mystery and the mystery of their power. To confine such an impulse to a single relationship, when an equal sense of spiritual affinity may belong to others, would be illogical; to expect to anticipate its promptings, to bind its future by a vow must be absurd. Passionate mutual love—not remembered from the past, but realized in the present—becomes the only sanction of intercourse between the sexes, and that intercourse is held to be true and noble whenever and wherever such mutual love exists.

Readers who suppose that the point of view suggested is one they can afford to neglect are relying on a convention which no longer possesses its former strength. It is not a mere theory that they are being asked to consider, but a principle of life upon which an increasing number of the keenest spirits in the rising generation are prepared to act. Taken, however, as theory, as we now must take it, it has the undeniable advantage of representing a real desire to understand and abide by what is true; and those who believe it to be mistaken must remember that, far from owing its origin to sensual or moody natures, it springs and grows freely in many that are most frank and clear. In exact proportion to the power and nobility of those

who embrace the doctrine is the importance of that sympathetic understanding which may enable us to disclose the error which lies at its root. It should first be noted that the strength of the doctrine lies not only in its assurance of the unity and purity of human nature, but also in the intimate connections it sets up between the act of intercourse and an exalted emotional state. No relation is suggested to problems of pleasure or the desire of it. Passionate love is proclaimed to be the only sanction. Its weakness lies in the fact that it recognizes one aspect only of a problem that has many; it has seized upon a single element of truth, and has claimed validity for the conclusions which seemed to follow from it, because it mistakes this element for the whole. But before calling attention to certain facts of nature, which the doctrine seems to disregard, it will be well to point to an inconsistency which is inherent in it as it stands. The main contention of those who support it is that spiritual affinity between lovers finds in the act that unites their bodies a natural and inevitable expression; that to ask the meaning or value of such expression, to expect to find a reason for seeking it, is the mark of a mind that is unnatural and impure. Consider, say they, the why and wherefore of so obvious an expression as shaking hands, apply the dissecting intellect, and who knows but you may persuade yourself that the expression is inessential, that the friendships in which it has indeed most meaning are those that could most easily dispense with it. Is that any reason for dispensing with it? A natural impulse prompts you to find such expression for your affection; an impulse no less natural prompts you to find complete expression for a passion more complete. These instincts are rooted in your nature more deeply than the deepest thought: to submit them to calculation is to drag them in the dust.

Such an argument, however, is fatal to the theory it is intended to support. If the essence of the act of intercourse is its spontaneity, how is that spontaneity to be reconciled with precautionary measures, by which possible consequences of the act may be avoided? Is not the mere fact that such consequences claim consideration, that they cannot fail to present themselves to the minds of the lovers, in whatever degree for

the moment they may be engrossed in one another, fatal to the pure instinctiveness of the act? Does it not render incomprehensible the theory that the act can be an end in itself? How can I take care at one time to prevent the consequences of an action, and at another declare that it is its nature to have no consequences? To reply that it is at certain times only that there is danger of such consequences and that it is at other times that the act has the essential value claimed for it, is no reply. It provides no means of escaping the compromising elements of calculation and precaution. Spontaneity is destroyed, and it is no less destroyed if it be argued that the consequences may be disregarded as preventable at all times. To prevent the consequence is to recognize its natural connection with the act.

But a wider aspect of the problem claims attention. It has hitherto been the assumption that spiritual affinity expressed itself naturally in physical union. Has the assumption any warrant? Among various tendencies of modern popular thought the tendency to an obvious identification of soul and body takes an important place. This tendency has value as a protest against the equally obvious separation of them, which characterized the thought of preceding generations. But it lends itself to a vague idealism of a dangerous kind. Some time ago a writer in the *Contemporary Review* stated, in an article entitled "The Higher Love," his belief that poets—of whom he instanced Shelley and Rossetti as examples—could testify to an experience denied to common men, in which the body underwent a spiritual change, its particles were readjusted, and it became the soul. A very little reflection upon the passages he quoted served to show that his interpretation of them was too literal. Who, for example has ever supposed that Rossetti's line "And when she kissed, her mouth became her soul" was intended other than figuratively, and even taken as a figure does it not appear somewhat exaggerated? Is it to be regarded seriously as in any sense a revealing statement? Yet the considerations which induced the writer to believe it so were familiar, and are thoroughly characteristic of the time. That some kind of identification of these apparent opposites

is possible, that in more exalted realms or on a higher plane of feeling they will be found to coalesce, is very commonly held. But by what token can the more perfect state be with certainty recognized? Opinion is here more vague. The general tendency of the new school would seem to tell clearly in favor of absorbing and transporting personal passion, finding expression in a concentrated emotional experience. It is partly because such experience baffles the understanding, and yet is known to be connected with periods of intense vitality, that it is regarded as a bond of mysterious union between the body and the soul. To one who, like the present writer, has an unchanging belief in the spiritual nature of so-called material things, who believes that the supposed distinction between the two is nothing more than a distinction between two attitudes of mind with regard to things, of which that attitude in which they appear as spiritual is the true one, it is a matter of the utmost moment to recall such a doctrine as this of the union of soul and body, in however minute a degree, from the regions of the mysterious and indescribable.

Thought on this subject is apt to begin with a rough but serviceable distinction that hands, feet, and the rest are physical or material; feelings, emotions, thoughts, spiritual in their nature: and it is believed that hands and feet are capable of exaltation, that they may be raised to the rank of spiritual agents. To this belief it is a corollary, generally overlooked, that thoughts, emotions and feelings, however spiritual in essence, are capable of depression, may be lowered to the rank of material agents. What is the key to the interchange? Imagine the one side as a complicated machinery—limbs, nerves, muscles—the other as a controlling board, complex also, and in intimate connection with the works. It is the purpose of the board to get from its machinery all the service it can give. When all its powers are fruitfully directed, and all possibility of waste foreseen and avoided, the board may reasonably be said to have brought its machinery into unity with itself. To command this perfect serviceableness clearly involves sustained and concentrated effort on the part of the directors, and a concerted plan of action. Unless they agree together, if

thought goes its own ways or emotion overrides it, if either of them is disturbed by feeling, the action of the machinery instead of being serviceable becomes destructive. It asserts itself blindly and its forces expend themselves without an end. Unless the directors can return to a mutual understanding, they must submit. They are reduced to the position of servants and minister to a machinery, which only continues working, because nothing exists to stop it. In other words the body becomes a spiritual agent, on condition that its directing forces, feeling, emotion, and thought, unite to exact from it the utmost service that it can render.

Space would not permit a general application of the principle. Our business here is to apply it to the intercourse of friends. How then, shall we discover terms against which neither thought, feeling, nor emotion will rebel, how hit upon a principle of action founded in that perfect coöperation of the three, which we have called spiritual? Let us suggest in the first place that spiritual affinity of the most perfect kind is as possible between friends of the same, as between friends of opposing sexes, and that therefore the expression of spiritual by physical union cannot be essential. Thus it would seem that both in the act of intercourse itself and the kind of relationship which looks to it as a climax, the understanding has been denied its proper place, and emotion left to guide alone. One and the same conclusion, it appears, may be reached by following two wholly different routes. And first, intelligence as a spiritual directing force claims that the resources at its command shall never be cramped or narrowed, but shall be allowed to expand and develop, to set up a net-work of relations with an ever widening world; that they shall cease growing only with the failure of that power of living sympathy on which their life depends. A man's greatness is proportionate to the area of the world in which he can truly be said to live. But he only lives when emotion animates his action and his thought. Therefore to control the flow of his emotion, to husband it as the most precious of his possessions, the very secret of his life and power, must become his most eager aim and interest. Of every moment in which he is conscious that emotion is stir-

ring in him beyond its usual force, his paramount duty is to ask whether such emotion is fulfilling the splendid function for which it is intended, whether the world in which it is placing him has the grandeur and nobility which call on him, if he is to enter into it, for a great outlay of his reserve of life. Now if—as is the opinion of those whom we are combating—the meaning of intercourse depends on the intensity of emotional exaltation that accompanies it, then, in view of all that is highest in human nature, and of the ideal in whose light man belongs not to his friend only, but to his friends, and to his country, and to the world, reason forbids as incompatible with these wider obligations the act which concentrates into passing moments of intercourse between individuals that vital energy which alone can sustain them in continuous communion with the wider life of humanity. In other words, the value of emotion is not in its intensity alone; it is not to be estimated by the sense of exuberant life which may accompany it, but by the grandeur of the object by which it is evoked. And in proportion as that object is grand and worthy of the soul will be the difficulty of considering the emotion it arouses in isolation from it. In every serious branch of life, it is an infallible sign that power is being wasted, if the exercise of it is valued for its own sake, and not for its results.

But by a second route it will be possible to reach the same conclusion. Renunciation and restraint are words which, according to the new school, have little that is serviceable to correspond to them. Believing as completely as they do in the singleness of human nature, they see no reason for refusing it the satisfaction of its desires. Difficulties that seem to involve this kind of duty have arisen, say they, because natural demands have been left unsatisfied, and nature is in revolt. But here again the understanding puts in its plea. The word exaltation, a favorite with the new school as we have seen already, itself implies the raising to a higher level of something which was not previously at that level. Applied to human life it involves the recognition in its course of rise and fall. It is better to be high than to be low, and it is better to maintain a lofty level than only occasionally to reach it. If

man is a free agent, he has to face this problem—how to raise his action to a high level and maintain it there. Effort is involved, and choice. Combine the notions, and it appears that elevating or elevated action will not be that which is natural in the more obvious sense. To set aside the action which offers itself as pleasant or exhilarating and to follow that which is arduous and perhaps painful can only be described finally as unnatural by those who deny that ascent is natural to man. Here again is an idea which may, rightly be applied to personal relationships of man and woman. What obvious and so-called natural expression a strong feeling claims in such relationship, our friends of the new school are not the first to discover. The assumption that, because obvious, it is elevating is their own. Rather, if noble ends are to be achieved, if human nature is to be exalted, its forces must always be maintained in a delicate balance, its action never permitted to drift towards satisfaction of the most prominent desire. If exaltation means submission of body to spirit, if it is to be applied to the state in which the body is devoting its energies without reserve to the fulfilment of a spiritual purpose, then to take the throbbing of the pulse, high pressure upon life's piston, as a token of it, is the meanest and most superficial of vulgarities. Exaltation is not attained by abandonment, but by control.

It will be useful to summarize at this point the conclusions to which the argument has been leading us. Starting in sympathy with those who criticise the common conception of marriage as a *pis aller*, and refuse to admit a divorce of body and spirit in the fundamental institution of society, we were led to endorse their view that the intercourse of the sexes when worthy of human nature must be in its essence a spiritual act, and that this act, involving, as it must, the most intimate and perfect mutual understanding, could only be conceived as spiritual, when such mutual understanding was present as a reality to the minds of those whom the act made one; that is, when the act was prompted by an unreserving love. Further than this we were unable to follow them. That the act without love is valueless is no proof that love is incomplete with-

out the act, and offers no suggestion that love requires it. Emotion is a spiritual agent, not merely according to its intensity, but in so far as it unites with reason, and gives its life to action which thought approves. Its tendency is to waste itself, to flow along the easy channel, to rush the rapids and revel in its own spray. If it is to work in the spirit's name, it must recognize the law of renunciation and admit that what is easiest is not always best.

But it would be of little value to criticise the authors of these new opinions without at the least suggesting what their logical development appears to be. They splendidly refuse to admit a slur upon human nature; they insist on viewing it as spiritual and entire. But when they attempt to explain the bearing of one of its profoundest instincts, their argument breaks down. It takes refuge in vagueness, and disappears in a quotation from the poets. Action, we have suggested, can only be called spiritual when emotion gives it life, and reason purpose. The act of intercourse is one that cannot be dissociated from emotion of the intensest kind. Viewed abstractly such emotion cannot be determined as a servant either of flesh or spirit. It may be either. It becomes spiritual in so far as its vital force is directed to the attainment of an intelligible end.

It is assumed by those whose view we are calling in question that the closest human relationship finds its culminating expression in the intercourse of the sexes. How then is closeness of relationship to be tested? To love is to desire the welfare of the beloved, and to make that welfare an end of action. A man's welfare is inseparable from the development of his powers. To develop his power is, as we saw earlier, to widen the world to which he is vitally related. And so the closer a relationship the more complete will be the recognition by each of its members, of the whole area of relations which form the life of the other, or on which the possibilities of wider life depend. A relationship is close, in the spiritual sense, when it means the adoption by each of the other's standpoint, when, by imaginative sympathy, the world which is living to the one can be placed at the service of the other, and each become greater by a share in the other's experience. By a thousand

complexities life conspires to hinder the realization of a perfect communion even in these highest of interests. And clearly the commonest and most elusive lies in the engrossing and fascinating attraction which a single personality can exercise, and which leads at last to the belief that to be related to the person is to submit to the fascination, the closeness of relationship measured by degree of mutual absorption, and of oblivion of all that lies beyond. What wonder if such closeness culminates in an act which makes each the other's world? But, if we accept the belief that a relationship is close in so far as it implies the recognition of wider relationships, what meaning can we ascribe to the act? Individual men and women meet together as members of a community, whose life did not begin with theirs and will not end with it. For all that they prize most dearly, they stand indebted to those who came before them, and in proportion to their nobility will be their desire to hand the treasure on to those who shall succeed. But it is futile to bequeath a treasure except to natures capable of cherishing it. The hope of the race lies in the character of the generation yet unborn.

A familiar truth is apt to lose its meaning in its familiarity; here it befits us to restate one of which the bearing is too seldom realized. It was remarked earlier that spiritual affinity of the most perfect kind was as possible between friends of the same as between friends of opposing sexes. The truth admits of an exception. To a relationship which includes difference of sex is attached a transcendent power which changes and widens its outlook, and cannot fail to give unique value to the mutual dependence of those whom it unites. To such relationships belongs the power, not merely of anticipating the wants of the future or providing conditions favorable to the growth of true and noble aspiration; the power belongs to them of giving continuance to the human family itself. All beauty, truth and honor, all that gives human life its dignity and its reward, appear but shadows when compared with the spirit itself, of which they are but the qualities or the expression. The love of man and woman means more than mutual recognition of the beautiful and good; it means, or may mean, the desire to

perpetuate the spirit in which the good and beautiful are most perfectly expressed. The advocates of the theory we are criticizing have insisted that intercourse between the sexes is spiritual only as springing from an exalted emotional state. We question the value of the exaltation to which they pointed, because it seemed to express itself in an arbitrary way. But as soon as thought attempts to grasp the limits or penetrate the possibilities of the act as we are now conceiving it, it must become clear that the boundaries of speech are over-passed; here at least is an act in which the whole being is involved, which reason can never exhaust, to which emotion can never be adequate. It may be possible to separate in thought an action and the results that spring from it, and to ask whether the action would be the same if the results were different. Yet it should be remembered that such a question, taken strictly, can only mean "Are these results, or are they not, fortuitous?" are they or are they not the true results? An action and its consequences are one: the meaning of an action is in its purpose. The act of intercourse is not in itself complete: its meaning depends on the part it plays in a relationship that outlives it. Our opponents pointed out that it did not become spiritual, that is, had not its true meaning, in being excluded from all relationships but one. We have tried to show that the extension of it leaves it no less arbitrary: it has meaning, we suggest, only as a single deliberate act of procreation, a conscious prayer for fruitfulness.

It was noted earlier that the new opinions had their source in a revolt against the conventional conception of marriage, and it was admitted that there were elements in that conception which fully justified the revolt. It would be unreasonable to leave the subject without suggesting a practical estimate of the new position in relation to the old. Is it really the outcome of a comprehensive grasp of the many aspects of a complicated case, or is it, in the last resort even less reasonable than it at first appears? The established conventions of society, the rules, that is, by which the multitude of men agree instinctively and persist in agreeing to govern their action, cannot fail to be based on a recognition of fact, which is not

the less real because it is often unconscious. If the conventions which surround marriage are among the most arbitrary to a superficial view, if nevertheless society expresses a more than usual determination to protect them, it is fair to argue that a fact, that can as little be overlooked as it can be understood, is here involved: the truth is that society is here, perhaps blindly, yet with a force which comes from the very heart of her being, fighting for the welfare of the generation to be: if the individual can sink reason in the passion of the moment, she cannot

"Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house."

Such is always her cry: and if the individual will not listen he must submit.

That the existing conception of marriage is imperfect, that it attempts to defend much that is indefensible, that the true issue is not clearly discerned, all this and more may easily be allowed. The mother's passionate devotion to her young is often wasted or misapplied: do not try on that account to persuade her that she has mistaken its true object: spend your energies, if you are wise, in directing it into serviceable channels. The new view, which we have been combating, begins by making an arbitrary distinction, which it is the whole strength of marriage, as we now understand it, to reject. It is probably forgotten by opponents that marriage as an institution to be practically applied must accommodate itself to existing conditions, and accept human nature as it is: if it admits the possibility of conduct not ideal, it may yet provide the best practicable means of limiting such conduct: it may of itself be productive of conditions in which the error of such conduct, its unnaturalness, most clearly comes to light. It is no argument against an institution, that it provides for the rank and file of men; the institution is great, if it affords them protection against their baser selves; if it does more, if it gives scope for the development of their true humanity, let us beware how we attack it.

The ideas which we have been considering in this paper, strike at marriage at its root. Righteous revolt against a con-

cession which, if human nature generally demands it, does not on that account become just in principle, is used as pretext for reckless assertion of a new morality, which neither instinct nor reason can justify. Marriage may have stooped to give appearance of decency to what is base; the reason was that a greater interest was at stake. If it was supposed that baseness could be forgotten when withdrawn from sight, the mistake was grievous: but is it not as grievous to suppose that to disclose it is to change its nature? Baseness will not change to honor in obedience to proclamation, however ingenuous such proclamation may be.

BASIL DE SELINCOURT.

KINGHAM, CHIPPING NORTON.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ETHICS.

Systematic writers on political science and ethics have with rare exceptions recognized a more or less close relationship between the two. The degree of the *rapprochement* thus recognized usually depends upon the view of the writer as to whether the State is a jural or moral entity or a combination of both. The ancient writers with few exceptions accorded to ethics a conspicuous if not a predominant place in their treatises on politics; indeed, the relation as it often appears in their descriptions is one of identification and consequently of confusion.

In his treatise on the "Republic," Plato combined both ethical and political theory, conceived ethics and politics to be in close connection, and even employed "violent metaphors to exaggerate the intimacy."¹ To him the end of the State was virtue, and this teleological idea so dominated his method as to lead him to completely subordinate his political science to his conception of morals.² Indeed, politics in his system of thought was merely a branch of ethics.

Aristotle, the most eminent of ancient writers on politics,

¹ Grote's "Plato," Vol. I, p. 166; Wundt, "Ethics" (tr. by Washburn), pp. 10-17.

² Compare Dunning, "Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval," p. 57.